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# **How does Sarah McLachlan make me donate to the SPCA?**

## **Emotional Intelligence and Emotionally Laden Persuasive Appeals**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the last 50 years there has been a plethora of academic research around consumer behavior (Macinnis & Folkes, 2010). While there have been a variety of topics examined by researchers, many aspects of persuasion and its effects on consumers' decisions are not fully understood. Given the prominence of advertising in the field of persuasion, it is not surprising that persuasion theories have received a great deal of attention in scholarly research (Shrum, Liu, Nespoli, & Lowrey, 2012).

Marketing and persuasion research have examined the importance of reaching the emotions of customers. It is known that feelings-oriented factors influence consumer behavior, attitudes and purchasing decisions (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Gardner, 1985; Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2010). Since emotion is an essential component of judgment and decision-making (Gohm & Clore, 2002; Schwarz & Clore, 1996), and are thought to motivate desire and action (Bagozzi, 1992), understanding the role of emotions in consumer decision-making and buying behavior is critical (Levy & Weitz, 2007).

Emotions were discussed within the framework of intelligence as early as 1920, when Thorndike first identified an aspect of emotional intelligence he called social intelligence (Goleman, 1995). In the 1980's the idea of multiple intelligences was revived, followed by emotional quotient and emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1988; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Many researchers have discussed the significance of emotional intelligence in the workplace. Cherniss (2000) argued that emotional intelligence contributes to the bottom line in any organization. Goleman (1998) discussed the importance of emotional intelligence over that of traditional cognitive measures of intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990) demonstrated quick recovery from emotional situations and, Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, and Palfai (1995) found emotional intelligence to be an indicator of those who can respond flexibly to change.

Emotional intelligence is "the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Salovey and Mayer (1990) proposed a model that is a more pure, ability-based conceptualization of emotional intelligence. They identified four different factors of emotional intelligence:

appraisal of emotion in the self and others, expression of emotion, regulation of emotion in the self and others, and utilization of emotion in solving problems (Opengart, 2005).

Others have approached the conceptualization of emotional intelligence as trait-based (Goleman, 1990), while others proposed a mixed-model approach considering both abilities and traits (Bar-On, 1997; Schutte, 2009). It has subsequently been shown that emotional intelligence (EI) influences problem solving and workplace innovation (Jordan & Troth, 2004), interpersonal skills, (Brown & Moshavi, 2005; Jordan & Troth, 2004; Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter & Buckley, 2003), and motivation and enthusiasm (Abraham, 2004; Carmeli & Josman, 2006; Gardner & Stough, 2003).

Given the influence of emotions on consumer behavior, emotional intelligence should enable a consumer to regulate the effect their emotions may have on purchasing behavior. Some research has focused on how emotion influences consumer's information processing (Lee & Sternthal, 1999), attitudes (Williams & Aaker, 2002), decision-making (Isen, 2001) and purchasing behavior (Kahn & Isen, 1993). Kidwell, Hardesty, and Childers (2008) reported that consumer emotional ability predicted superior product selection and in a subsequent study found that 'emotionally calibrated' consumers, those possessing greater ability as well as confidence in their emotional abilities, made better decisions (Opengart & McCall, 2013).

Emotion has also been shown to influence perception of the store's image, the number of items purchased, the amount of money spent, and even the time spent shopping (Cohen & Areni, 1998). Mano and Oliver (1993) found that positive and negative affect mediated the relationships between product judgment and customer satisfaction. Similarly, Stayman and Batra (1991) found that people viewing an ad while in a positive emotional state induced stronger positive feelings toward a product.

Emotions may play a strong role in "impulse buying," which in contrast to rational reflective purchasing, has been described as uncontrolled, spontaneous, and influenced by arousal and affect (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998; Faber & Vohs, 2004; Kacen & Lee, 2002), implying that the wish to acquire a product is elicited on the spot and creates a need for immediate gratification.

More recently, there has been interest in understanding the role of emotion in persuasion appeals due to debate on the effectiveness of rational vs. emotional appeals on consumers. While affective positioning aims at emotions, cognitive positioning depends on logical arguments, or presenting the reasons why a consumer should choose a particular product (Panda, Panda, & Mishra, 2013).

The aforementioned debate may stem from the seminal work depicting differences in impact of rational and emotional appeals by Copeland (1924), in which the author posited that individual customers buy products and services for either a rational or emotional reason. It has been suggested that a combination of cognitive and affective components is best (Panda, Panda, & Mishra, 2013) and that the effectiveness of each may depend on a number of factors, including product, category, culture, (Panda, Panda, & Mishra, 2013) and cognitive capacity of an individual (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000).

Cialdini (1984), in a classic presentation of social influence, identified six influence principles that lead people to say 'yes', when they really want to say 'no'. Each of these principles is built upon rules that generally serve us well but within a peripheral sphere can be exploited. An example is the notion that people have a desire to be consistent and will often agree to large requests, if they have first agreed to a small request. Other tools of influence include the impact of scarcity, real and imagined authority, liking and reciprocity (Opengart & McCall, 2013).

Each of these elements could be used to influence consumer behavior, yet the degree of impact on the emotions and responses of the consumers may differ from one person to another. Consequently, we posit that a person's level of emotional intelligence serves to mediate the effect of social influence on the consumer. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine whether emotional intelligence may mediate the impact of persuasive attempts in consumer decision making.

## Method

A selection of commercials representing and eliciting different emotions was presented to participants using video within an online survey. Those same participants were administered the Schutte (1998) assessment of emotional intelligence, one of the most widely used self-report questionnaires of emotional intelligence. This questionnaire is referred to by many names in the literature (e.g., Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence [SSREI] scale, Emotional Intelligence Scale [EIS], Schutte Self-Report Inventory [SSRI]) but in this research will be referred to as Schutte's Assessing Emotions Scale (AES) because of the authors' own reference to the scale as such (Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009). An internal consistency analysis showed a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .90, and the 2-week test-retest reliability of the questionnaire was .78. (Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, L. (1998),

The participants rated the likelihood of purchasing the product after viewing each video. AES results and video ratings were analyzed. In order to test the mediational role of emotional intelligence on emotional persuasive appeals, we followed the guidelines provided by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008).

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rose Opengart is an Assistant Professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University – Worldwide. She earned her Ph.D. in Human Resources & Organizational Development at The University of Georgia and a Post-Doctoral AACSB Certificate in Marketing and Management at The University of Florida. She currently serves as a reviewer for several journals including *Cornell Hospitality Research Report Series*, *Supply Chain Management: an International Journal*, *Academy of Management Executive*, and *Human Resource Development Review*. Her work has won an Outstanding Conference Paper Award from Academy of Human Resource Development, and has been selected for publication in *The E-Learning Yearbook*, McGraw-Hill, 2001. Her research interests include emotional intelligence, women's career development, and talent management.

Dr. Michael McCall, a Professor and Chair of Marketing at Ithaca College, and is a Research Fellow of the Cornell Center for Hospitality Research. He earned his Ph.D. in social psychology from Arizona State University and has published over 45 academic articles. His research program focuses on the role of customer reward programs in creating customer loyalty, rebate programs, and emotional intelligence. He currently is the Editor of the *Cornell Hospitality Research Report Series*, and sits on the editorial boards of *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *The Cornell Quarterly* and *The Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*. His work has been funded by the National Institutes of Health and the Center for Hospitality Research and has appeared in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, *Journal of Socio-Economics*, and the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, among others.

